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Washtenaw Dems: Expand Unemployment Benefits

Package increases weekly benefits, provides 13-week extension

LANSING – With Michigan workers facing high unemployment in the state's still-struggling economy, Washtenaw House and Senate Democrats today announced a package of bills that would increase unemployment benefits and extend benefits by 13 weeks when the state's unemployment rate reaches 5 percent.

"When workers at companies like GM face layoffs, we must do everything we can to support them as they search for work," said State Rep. **Kathy Angerer** (D-Dundee). "Extending benefits for our workers can mean the difference between slipping into poverty and staying afloat."

The Democratic legislation would:

- Extend unemployment benefits by 13 weeks when unemployment reaches 5 percent.
- Increase the weekly unemployment benefit to a maximum of \$408 from the current \$362 and tie future increases to inflation.
- Increase the weekly benefit allowance for a dependent from \$6 to \$20 per week.
- Increase the multiplier that determines benefits from 4.1 percent to 4.4 percent and increase the multiplier used to calculate the number of weeks a worker can receive benefits from 43 percent to 45 percent of the base-period wages.
- Round unemployment benefits up to the nearest dollar. Benefits currently are rounded down.

Michigan's unemployment benefits were last increased in 2002. If benefits had kept pace with inflation since then, unemployed workers would have received a maximum of \$396 this year and a maximum of \$408 in 2006.

"Working families built this state and we need to stand up for them during shaky economic times," said State Rep. **Alma Wheeler Smith** (D-Salem). "Michigan residents are losing their jobs while CEOs of bankrupt companies are giving themselves lavish compensation packages, and that's wrong. This legislation will help protect our workers."

"The financial strains associated with sudden and prolonged unemployment can wreak havoc on even the most organized and careful family budget," said State Sen. **Liz Brater** (D-Ann Arbor). "In these tough economic times, Michigan citizens need guarantees that unemployment benefits will be sufficient and available."

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